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ABSTRACT

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COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING: SOME LESSONS LEARNED

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Abstract: This paper considers the effectiveness of citizen advisory boards as vehicles for community input to educational decision-making. It is based on an evaluation by Syracuse Research Corporation of the Piedmont Schools Project (PSP), a planned experiment in comprehensive change in a K-12 school system. The data derive from community surveys, personal interviews, and participant observation techniques. Results suggest that despite federal and state mandates for broad-based citizen involvement in educational decision-making, citizen advisory boards still are likely to be (1) "paper" councils, (2) dominated by "advantaged" clienteles, and (3) unrepresentative of the community at large.

EA 011 721

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING: SOME LESSONS LEARNED

The past decade has witnessed a significant increase in citizen involvement in cooperative educational decision-making, a development which received considerable impetus from a variety of compensatory education programs authorized by Congress in the mid 1960's (Hightower, p. 1). Implicit in most of these programs was the dual assumption that (1) an increase in citizen involvement in the decisions made by local school districts could help to increase the program's responsiveness to the needs of children, and (2) while schooling changes may be mandated from afar, they are implemented at the local level, and local citizens can make or break school innovations.

The literature on this subject suggests that while the concept of cooperative decision-making has gained increasingly stronger endorsement at the federal and state levels, implementation at the local level has been sporadic and uneven. For all the efforts to explain this occurrence, few studies have attempted to determine the extent to which citizens--in particular, parents--are effectively involved in the decision-making process. Nor, equally important, has there been much use of field study methodology to provide a sense either of the overall dimensions of citizen involvement in educational decision-making as viewed by the participants, or of the common, everyday character it has for them.

The case study of cooperative decision-making herein described employs a variety of field-study techniques--community surveys, personal interviews, and participant observation--to examine the viability of citizen advisory boards as vehicles for community input to the decision-making process. It is based on an evaluation by Syracuse Research Corporation of the Piedmont Schools Project (PSP), a planned experiment intended to change radically and comprehensively the character of an entire K-12 school district, to include an overhaul of the existing apparatus for citizen participation and involvement in various cooperative educational and policy-making roles. Funded by the National Institute of Education as a project within the Experimental Schools Program, the PSP ranged over a five-year period (1972-77) and cost $6.2 million. It involved six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, and was located in Greer, South Carolina, a subdistrict of the Greenville County School District. Syracuse Research Corporation was involved in the evaluation of the PSP over the final two years of the Project under contract NIE-400-75-0068.

The author of this article was the principal investigator for Syracuse Research Corporation of those aspects of the evaluation related to community involvement in the PSP decision-making process. This included interviewing, as well as observing and analyzing the interactions between PSP citizen advisory board members and school administrators, and the design and administration of two large-scale house-to-house surveys of the

community. Special attention was given to the analysis of specific subgroups within the population under study based on ethnic background and socio-economic level.

THE FRAMEWORK

Mindful of the commitment of the federal and state governments to the concept of cooperative decision-making, the PSP sought from the outset to involve the Greer citizenry in decisions affecting its schools. It operated on the assumption that contact and input from the community would produce a happier and more satisfied school clientele, increased moral and financial support, hence, the successful implementation of the innovations represented by the PSP. To that end, it established a citizens' advisory board, referred to as the Board of Cooperatives (BOC). The BOC consisted of thirteen representatives from a number of Greer citizen organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, PTA, Ministers' Association, Garden Club Council, Industrial Production Workers, and Black Concerned Citizens. Intended to be socio-economically representative of the Greer community, the BOC was to have had a major impact on the PSP decision-making process by actively involving "students, parents, community groups, and professional educators . . . in a continuing process of deciding the purposes of education in an evolving society, in suggesting concrete ways to achieve those purposes, in recommending policy governing education to the Board of Trustees, and in providing feedback and grass roots evaluation relating to local education" (excerpt from 1972 PSP proposal).

METHODS

The evaluation of the Board of Cooperatives of the Piedmont Schools Project was guided by several questions:

1. What was the impact, if any, of the BOC on the PSP decision-making process?
2. To what extent did the community know about and use the BOC as a formal mechanism for input to the PSP decision-making process?
3. Was the BOC representative of the socio-economic make-up of the community?
4. Was BOC membership stable or changing over time?

The data upon which the evaluation of the Board of Cooperatives is based derive from:

1. A community survey administered by household visits in spring 1976, eliciting information from 240 parents (30 from each of the Project schools) and from 216 of the citizenry at large, randomly drawn from the Greer community on the basis of ethnic and socio-economic considerations.
2. A parent survey, also administered by household visits, in spring 1977, eliciting information from 346 parents, randomly drawn from the attendance rolls of the eight Project schools.
3. Monitoring of BOC meetings during the final two years of the Project.
4. A content analysis of the minutes of BOC meetings.
5. Formal interviews with 94 individuals whose views pertained to the study of the community.

6. Informal contacts with approximately 600 individuals whose views pertained to the study of the community.

DISCUSSION

> Yep. Coop Board representatives could cause trouble if they wanted. Mrs. _____, for example, has the potential to raise all kinds of hell. . . . If the Cooperatives does nothing else but reduce that possibility, it's done something. [Comments of PSP staff member, Interviewed October 29, 1975.]
>
> Just the existence of the Cooperatives Board is a positive factor. It provides a vehicle for communication that didn't exist beforehand. I believe it's been helpful to the administration, too. Made it aware of problems it might have missed. [Comments from Cooperatives Board Representative, Interviewed May 24, 1976.]

Clearly considered by the Piedmont Schools Project to be the community's primary vehicle for formal input to the decision-making process, the BOC consisted of a set of several Greer citizen organizations, presumably representative of the community at large, having as their function the articulation of community views on Greer schooling. Thirteen different community organizations--some highly structured, some loosely structured--were involved with the PSP through the Board of Cooperatives over the life of the Project, including:

-Greer Chamber of Commerce

-PTA Cooperative

-Student Cooperative

-Teachers' Cooperative

-Ministers' Cooperative

-Civic/Fraternal Cooperative

-Garden Club Council

-Church Lay Groups Cooperative

-Farmers' Cooperative

-Industrial Production Workers Cooperative

-Black Concerned Citizens

-Educational Interest Groups

-Community Clubs

The individual cooperatives each selected a representative to the parent Board of Cooperatives which, in turn, elected its own officers and which met monthly with the Executive Director and various administrators and teachers of the PSP.

The parent Board of Cooperatives is cited in the PSP Continuation Application as responsible for reporting on the evolving purpose of education for the PSP and for recommending to the Superintendent of the Greenville County School District directives concerning policy for the Project schools. Further, it was to have provided a decision-making function through BOC members serving on advisory and ad hoc committees.

Attendence Patterns and Socio-Economic Makeup

Was BOC membership stable or changing over time? And was it representative of the socio-economic makeup of the community? To answer these questions, we examined BOC attendance patterns over the life of the project, and the socio-economic characteristics of representatives of the BOC during each of the project's

final two years.*

Table 1 summarizes the percentage of BOC meetings attended by representatives of individual cooperatives during each of the five years of the project. During these years, one notes the declining attendance of representatives of three fairly populous segments of the Greer community (Industrial Production Workers, Farmers, and Black Concerned Citizens Cooperatives) and the emergence of three new cooperatives midway through PSP-Year-One (Church Lay Group, Educational Interest Groups, and Community Clubs). The active membership of the BOC stabilized by PSP-Year-Four at a level involving representatives from nine individual cooperatives.

Cooperatives 2, 4 and 5, which sought and obtained representation on the board midway through PSP-Year-One, represented groups not previously constituted (in contrast to groups such as Garden Clubs, Ministers' Association, Students, etc.). These groups tended to include the relatively more affluent, more educated segments of the community. Their emergence and survival in the BOC stand in marked contrast to the demise of Cooperatives 10, 11 and 13--the worker, farming and black groups--which represented three fairly populous, but generally less affluent and less educated segments of the community.

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*Socio-economic data on Cooperatives Board members for the first three years of the project were not readily available. The more current information, however, is a good indication of the Board's socio-economic evolution by the time of the project's conclusion.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF ATTENDANCE OF COOPERATIVES BOARD MEETINGS BY INDIVIDUAL COOPERATIVES REPRESENTATIVES DURING EACH OF THE FIVE YEARS OF PSP

Names of Individual Cooperatives (in descending order of attendance)	Academic Year 1972-73 *(n=10) Percent	1973-74 (n = 12) Percent	1974-75 (n - 9) Percent	1975-76 (n = 12) Percent	1976-77* (n = 11) Percent	Overall 8/1972-6/1977**** (n = 54) n	Percent
1. Church Lay Groups**	75	83	78	92	91	41	85
2. Community Clubs**	75	92	100	58	73	38	79
3. PTA	100	100	78	83	18	41	76
3. Teachers	70	92	89	33	100	41	76
5. Ministers' Association	70	83	78	75	55	39	72
6. Educational Interest Group**	100	100	44	83	36	34	71
7. Garden Clubs	70	58	78	83	64	38	70
8. STudents	80	100	67	83	18	38	70
9. Chamber of Commerce	60	58	56	92	73	37	69
10 Industrial Production Workers	40	58	33	0	0	16	30
11. Farmers	80	33	0	0	0	12	22
12. Civic/Fraternal***	---	67	0	0	0	8	18
13. Black Concerned Citizens	40	42	0	0	0	9	17

*n = Number of meetings held during June through May of each school year. Year Five includes meetings held July 1976 through June 1977.

** = Organized February 1973.

*** = Organized June 1973; attended 1973-74 year only.

****n = Total number of meetings that could have been attended by each cooperative representative dating from time of inception of cooperative.

n = 48 possible meetings in case of Church Lay Groups, Educational Interest Group, and Community Clubs Cooperatives.

n = 44 possible meetings for Civic/Fraternal Cooperatives.

This pattern suggests that citizen interest and involvement in the Cooperatives Board, as indicated by percentages of meetings attended, was a function of two variables:

(1) The extent to which individual cooperatives were already part of an independent organized body, such as the PTA, Students Council, Garden Clubs. Representatives of such organizations had the advantage of a "ready made" constituency which met regularly in any case.

(2) Socio-economic and educational characteristics of the members. Church Lay Groups, Educational Interest Groups and Community Clubs did not draw from "ready made" constituencies; they met with their constituency quarterly, if at all; yet percentages of BOC meetings attended by their representatives were both high and stable. The suggestion is that these individual representatives attended essentially because they wanted to and because the character of the Board's activities was compatible with their own degree of interest and level of education.

Table 2 indicates that during Year Four, discounting the student representative, who was headed for college anyway, seven of the eight representatives of the Cooperatives Board held either a college or postgraduate degree. And, during Year Five, if one again discounts the student representative, fully 100 percent of the membership had a college education, with six of that seven falling into the postgraduate degree category. The comparable figures from the 1975-76 Community Survey of those Greer citizens having a college education are 17 percent in the community-at-large sample, and 10 percent in the parents' sample.

Looked at in terms of socio-economic standing as derived from an approximation of the character and quality of their respective residential areas, one notes that, during Year Four, six of the nine representatives resided in areas with the highest

rated socio-economic level (upper-middle income, professional, all white). And, during Year Five, six of eight of the representatives so resided.

In noting the one-sided composition of the Board, it should be said that it was not the case that the farming, mill worker and black segments of the population were not welcome to attend or to be represented in proportion to their numbers. Indeed, the current membership decried their absence. But the plain fact of the matter is that they did not attend and had not been in regular attendance--depending on the specific group--for anywhere from two to four years. Thus, the Cooperatives Board clearly represented parts of the community better than others, and some parts--obviously a good many--not at all.

Impediments to BOC Representativeness

Several factors tended to impede the Board's realization of representative membership, not the least of which was (1) retaining the interest of the less affluent, less educated segments of the community in a level of activity that was viewed by them as either irrelevant to their immediate interests or beyond their understanding, and (2) the difficulty of drawing from the unorganized ranks of the mill worker, black and farming segments of the community. The Cooperatives Board, in short, was largely upper middle class, because *the style, level and character of BOC activities were consistent with, and came to be dominated by, the upper-middle-class orientation of its membership.* In the words of a former Cooperatives Board representative:

> I think it [the Board] is a good idea . . . [but] it's not representative of the community because the people attracted to that kind of thing are not from all walks of life. You get people who care. But you also get them from the upper middle class. And I don't think all of these are in touch with reality. But there is so much apathy in the school system. I don't know how you get more people involved. [Excerpt from interview with BOC representative, May 24, 1976.]

TABLE 2

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STANDING COOPERATIVES BOARD MEMBERSHIP
YEARS FOUR AND FIVE

	Level of Education			*Socio-Economic Description of Residential Area		
	High School	College	Postgraduate	(1) Upper	(2) Middle	(3) Low
Year Four	2	4	3	6	1	2
Year Five	1	1	6	6	1	1

*Descriptors same as used to designate socio-economic status of residential areas on 1976 and 1977 Community and Parent Surveys.

(1) = Upper Middle Income, Professional, all white.

(2) = Middle Income, white, teachers, businessmen and some mill workers.

(3) = Mill workers, white; or lower black inner-city mixed economic.

Pointing more to the organizational aspects of the problem, still another Board member made the following observation:

> Used to be a representative of the workers on it, I'm told. But I'll bet he was picked by only six or seven management type people. And the Black Concerned Citizens, well, the world's full of Black Concerned Citizens. But how do you go about organizing groups like that! I think what you got here is this. In any community--like Greer--you have very few people either willing to give time or who have the expertise. So you find you have a tight little group of people who have exhibited the willingness and ability to do these things. I think probably the fact that these people are willing to do it is the reason for this social segregation on the Board. So, anyway, there is no representative for this large group of textile workers. They may be represented indirectly by these other clubs, of course. But that's about it. The problem... how do you organize this, this--amoeba? How do you pick a representative from this vast group? And how does he communicate? If you have a union, then you'd have an immediate way to organize. [Excerpt from interview with BOC representative, November 6, 1975.]

Since the Board member had raised the question of unions, the interviewer asked him to respond to a suspicion that *the local mills' alleged fear of unions was one impediment to organized representation of any kind involving mill workers.* The response was:

> I have no reason to doubt it. You have probably put into words what we all know but don't want to admit. You see, I'm sure the management of textile plants could accomplish this--organize representatives of the workers for the Board. 'Cause they have no trouble getting the annual giving program for the United Way organized. But they resist any sort of organization of this kind. [Excerpt from interview with BOC representative, November 6, 1975]

As for the *absence of Black representation on the Board*, in addition to the lack of a Black organization comparable to any of the existing cooperatives, a former Black representative to the Board pointed to the irrelevance to Black interests of the topics

discussed at Board meetings:

> Well, as far as Blacks, there was nothing there of interest I can think of.

But the reason for lack of attendance by Blacks went perhaps deeper than that:

> I don't know if they [Blacks] feel welcome [at these meetings]. Sometimes made to feel uncomfortable. "How do you mean?" They ask <u>one</u> Black to sit in with 20 or 30 whites. Maybe they should put two or three together. I was the <u>only</u> black when I attended...some Blacks still unsure of themselves. Certainly heard this a lot of times. They say, 'Well, I was the only Black.' [Excerpt from interview with BOC representative, November 18, 1975.]

In its desire to be representative of community concerns the Cooperatives Board operated against still another handicap: *The vast majority of the community was unaware of its very existence.* Of the 210 citizens constituting the community-at-large sample of the 1976 Community Survey, only 29 percent claimed to have even heard of the Board. Of the 238 parents questioned separately on this same survey, only 36 percent indicated they had heard of the Board. Yet most of these indicated a basic lack of acquaintance with the Board's purposes and functions. The 1977 Parent Survey showed a slight improvement in this respect, with the level of parent awareness of the Board's existence rising to 41 percent (n=346).

Thus, the concerns that were brought to the Cooperatives Board's attention came from a strictly limited segment of the community, to the degree that they came at all. In all likelihood, they came mainly from individual representatives' colleaques, peers, friends, and neighbors. As one representative explained:

> This is another example of something the community doesn't even know exists. We're trying to alleviate this partially through publicity in the <u>Citizen</u>.

> But if people are like me, they don't even read the Citizen . . . people who supposedly keep up with things don't even know about the Board of Cooperatives. [BOC member, Interviewed November 5, 1975.]

The study concluded that while it could not be said that the Cooperatives Board failed altogether to convey certain of the community's concerns to the PSP administration or to disseminate information concerning the school program to a larger segment of the community, the channels for the attainment of this objective were very limited.

The Nature of Board of Cooperatives Involvement in the PSP

The topics addressed by the Cooperatives Board and the concerns expressed by members over the course of the project were diverse, and they varied in the level of intensity with which they were raised and examined. Drawing upon field notes, recorded observations of meetings, and BOC minutes, *Table* 3 was constructed to show the kinds of items that characterize the involvement of the Board with the Project and the community during Year Four, a year which, in our judgment, was as typical as any of the five years of the Project. The items have been grouped for analytic purposes into four broad categories: PSP communications to the BOC, community concerns, BOC activities, and procedural matters. In addition, members had the opportunity at each meeting to report on their individual cooperatives. However, their relationship to their constituencies was in some cases tenuous, and in others more in the nature of information-giving than a two-way exchange; thus inputs to the BOC by this channel were minimal and sporadic.

The prevalence of PSP inputs to BOC meetings and agendas suggests in some measure the nature and type of communication flow between project administration and the Board--more often information flowing from the PSP to the BOC than an interchange involving

TABLE 3

TOPICS COVERED AT BOARD OF COOPERATIVES MEETINGS: 1975-1976

Meeting Date 1975-1976	PSP Communications							Community Concerns				BOC Activities				Procedural Items			
	PSP Slide Presentation	PSP Oral Presentation	PSP Transference (Oral Report)	PSP Extended School Year Project	PSP Summer School Program	Personnel Assignments by PSP		School Board Reappointment	Discipline	Prayer in Schools	School District Area Realignment	Chamber of Commerce Report	Spring Town Meeting	Community Survey	Board Self-Evaluation	Communication Committee Appt.	BOC Rep. to District Citizens Advisory Com.	BOC Activities For Year Four	Representation of Industrial Cooperative
June		X	X			X			X								X		X
July		X	X	X								X							X
August	X	X			X	X			X				X					X	X
September	X	X	X									X							X
October	X															X			
November		X																	
December	X							X											
January	X	X						X											
February	X								X	X			X	X					
March													Held	X					
April														Training					
May									X		X			Handed Out	Level II Sug'n.				
June	(New Board Starts in June)																		

major inputs to the PSP from the BOC. However, in some cases presentations were made in response to a BOC request or intimation of concern. Such items may be seen as BOC initiatives in keeping the Project accountable and Project responsiveness to BOC concerns. Some PSP presentations generated little or no discussion, others somewhat more; but recorded observations suggest little in the way of extended or heated exchange over "burning issues."

PSP slide showings were generally presented by the Project's Communications Specialist and dealt with such topics as the role of the principal , the role of the BOC, and open education. Verbal presentations included attention to general aspects or components of the PSP--project status, project evaluation, transference, learning assessment (Greer test scores compared with national data), the summer demonstration school, the role of paraprofessionals; and items relating to the extended school year project, student fees, reading programs, special education and the Middle School, plan to improve discipline, and the process parents should use to voice complaints.

As the school year progressed, more of the Board's agenda items fell in the community concerns and BOC activities categories. A state senator attended one Board meeting to clarify plans for reapportionment of the Greenville County School Board, and at another meeting the Board discussed the realignment of areas within the school district. However, there is no record of further pursuit of these questions by the Board nor evidence to suggest that such discussions had any significant influence upon district policies.

The primary activities (action as distinct from discussion) of the BOC in PSP-Year-Four were associated with the 1976 Community Survey and the organization of a spring "Town Meeting." Board members were involved in various stages of the Community Survey from design stages to training to interviewing to sharing of

"results." For some this represented a considerable investment of effort.

The Town Meeting was organized by a small subcommittee of the Board and focused heavily on the recurring topic of "discipline in schools," certainly an "issue" area. Yet it is clear that the topic and a related survey (administered to some community members and project personnel) were promoted primarily by one very active member of the BOC. Asked in an interview prior to the Meeting who had decided on the discipline theme, she responded:

> "Well, I did...I've had so many people catch me in the grocery store, or on the streets--because of my Coop Board involvement--who tell me they are upset about discipline..." "Was there any other reason for deciding on the discipline theme?" I asked. "Yes. There was a reason for trying to decide on one thing. I attended the Town Meeting last year. I felt most of the people were already familiar with what was said." "Then," she added, "discipline seemed a selling point." [Excerpt from interview with BOC member April 22, 1976.]

Yet, although the topic was one that appeared likely to attract an audience, attendance was far below expectations. The "discipline survey" antagonized some PSP personnel who volunteered expressions of irritation at the negative thrust of the survey questions (this during interviews and informal exchanges with evaluators). The meeting was dominated by data-laden presentations made by the "platform" panel. The evaluator who observed this meeting records:

> ...an absence of any 'real' interchange between the audience and various representatives of PSP, other than via the approximately nine questions raised toward the close of the meeting by several parents before Dr. D. [Project Director] surprisingly cut the questioning short with the comment, "Time for one more burning question...we promised to have you out of here by 9:30, and we're gonna do it." [Excerpt from observer notes at Town Meeting, April 26, 1976.]

Content Analysis of Cooperatives Board Meetings Year One to Five

In an effort not only to determine more specifically what the BOC did, but what, if any, impact it had on PSP administration thinking, we analyzed the collected minutes of the monthly meetings of the Board over the entirety of the Project's five years, August 1972-June 1977.*

The items under consideration were grouped for analytic purposes into five categories:

A. Meeting Items by Category**

1. Cooperatives Board Related
2. PSP Related***
3. School Related****
4. Community Related
5. Greenville County School District (GCSD) Related

B. Initiator/Presenter of Meeting Item

1. PSP Executive Director
2. Cooperatives Board Members
3. PSP Staff Members
4. Other

---

*The actual number of Coop Board Meetings held each year were as follows: Year One - 10; Year Two - 12; Year Three - 9; Year Four - 12; Year Five - 11.

**Includes miscellaneous items not indicated on Agenda,

***Items related to PSP as a whole, mainly of an administrative or organizational nature.

****Items related to the schools or a particular school, mainly of a curricular or instructional nature.

C. Decisions in Order of Significance/Impact*

1. Low
2. Medium
3. High

D. Information Flow

1. Information/Presentation from PSP to Coop Board
2. Information Requested of PSP by Coop Board
3. Individual Coop Reports
4. Coop Board Study/Committee Reports
5. Specific Requests for Information by Individual Coops.

E. Cooperatives Board Impact on PSP

1. Items from PSP for Group Board Consideration/Action
2. Coop Board Policy Recommendations to PSP or GCSD
3. PSP or GCSD Adoption Coop Board Policy Recommendations

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*Cooperatives Board decisions classified as having a "low," "medium," or "high" significance/impact in relation to PSP operation and/or administration thinking. For example:

Low: Routine administrative decisions having relatively low level of potential impact on PSP operation and/or administration thinking, including annual election of officers, the invitation of PSP staff to meetings, the decision to table a motion, approval of minutes of preceding meeting.

Medium: Non-routine decisions with a relatively medium level of potential impact, such as the establishment of study committees or committees to organize special activities such as the Town Meeting or Community Survey, a vote to support students' efforts at financing a student center, approval of revision of the Board of Cooperatives By-Laws, the passing of a resolution urging that pressure be applied to install a traffic light at a school crossing.

High: Decisions with a relatively high potential impact, such as the decision to hold a Town Meeting or to administer a Community Survey. These were, in fact, the only decisions made by the Board which were judged by the evaluation team to have had a "high" potential impact.

Table 4 is a summary of the frequency (n) of items indicative of the above categories of information over each of the Project's five years.

A. Meeting Items by Category

The Cooperatives Board dealt mostly with items related to its own purposes and function (n=155), and dealt least with matters related to the Greer Community (n=40) and the Greenville County School District (n=24). It dealt a good deal with items related to the PSP (n=78) and the schools (n=106). Indeed, if one combines these latter two categories, thus "lumping" items within the Project as a whole which were of an administrative/organizational or curricular/behavioral nature, it turns out that the Board was most occupied with these kinds of items (n=184).

These figures are not surprising. They suggest, in part, that the Board members were most concerned with matters closest to "home," namely, their own functioning and organization, and PSP/school related concerns. Concerns related to the community generally or, for that matter, to the greater Greenville County School District did not enter prominently into the picture.

B. Initiator/Presenter of Meeting Item

1. It is a weakness of the Board of Cooperatives Minutes that they did not always clearly indicate who initiated an item for discussion or consideration. Presuming, however, that such omissions are at least consistently non-biased, the data indicate that Board members did much of the talking, and much of the initiating over the five years of the project (n=220). The amount of talking, of course, is not necessarily equated with impact or influence. It may merely suggest that the Board of Cooperatives served as a useful and convenient forum for debate irrespective of the impact of such debate on PSP operation and administration thinking. Indeed, Section E of Table 4 implies that for all their

TABLE 4

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF COOPERATIVES BOARD MEETING FOR EACH OF THE FIVE YEARS OF PSP: AUGUST 1972-JUNE 1977

	Year 1	2	3	4	5	Total N
A. MEETING ITEMS BY CATEGORY						
1. Cooperatives Board Related	37	41	22	36	19	115
2. PSP Related	13	28	9	10	18	78
3. School Related	8	48	7	32	11	106
4. Community Related	1	9	10	8	12	40
5. Greenville County School District Related	6	3	6	7	2	24
	65	129	54	93	62	
B. INITIATOR/PRESENTER OF MEETING ITEM						
1. PSP Executive Director	22	35	9	16	18	100
2. Cooperatives Board Member	39	79	30	49	23	220
3. PSP Staff Members	2	9	13	22	16	62
4. Other	2	6	2	6	6	22
	65	129	54	93	63	
C. DECISIONS IN ORDER OF SIGNIFICANCE/IMPACT						
1. Low	24	17	13	15	14	83
2. Medium	9	7	6	3	7	32
3. High	0	0	2	2	1	5
	33	24	21	20	22	
D. INFORMATION FLOW						
1. Information/Presentation from PSP to Coop Board	20	42	23	37	30	152
2. Information Requested of PSP by Coop Board	3	11	6	0	5	25
3. Individual Coop Reports	1	56	7	24	6	96
4. Coop Board Study/Committee Reports	9	4	6	8	2	29
5. Specific Requests for Information By Individual Coops	0	7	0	2	0	9
	35	120	42	71	43	
E. COOPERATIVES BOARD IMPACT ON PSP						
1. Items from PSP for Coop Board Consideration/Action	4	2	9	6	7	28
2. Coop Board Policy Recommendations to PSP or GCSD	1	3	3	4	0	11
3. PSP or GCSD Adoption Coop Board Policy Recommendations	0	0	0	0	0	0
	5	5	12	10	7	

talk, the Board had little impact on PSP at all.

2. The three PSP Executive Directors (Dr. J, Dr. D and Dr. B.), among them did a fair share of initiating and presenting items (n=100). Though this is considerably less than is indicated by the total number of items dealt with by the Board members, one again should proceed with caution in equating quantity with either "quality" or impact.

3. PSP staff members intiated or presented a fair proportion of items (n=62). The striking feature here is the steady growth of the number of their presentations, N=2, 9, 13, 22, and 16, respectively, over each of the five years of the Project.

Whether the appearances of the PSP staff were "because of" or "in spite of" the Board members almost is beside the point. The point is that the Board appears to have been increasingly utilized as a forum of exchange between its representatives and the PSP staff. Obviously some of the PSP staff's appearances were at the Board's request, though if this is the case, it is masked by the minutes; for Section D.2 of Table 4 indicates something of a decline over the years in the number of instances in which Board members requested information from PSP. It is more likely that the Project perceived that it would be in everyone's best interests to keep the Board increasingly "informed" of Project activities, and to anticipate insofar as possible Board members' likely concerns. Perhaps the PSP simply gained increased respect for the Board's capacity for inquisitiveness coupled with the latter's potential for instigation.

"Other" presenters/initiators such as Greenville County School District staff or outside individuals such as the local state senator appear for a total of 22 instances over the Project's five years. Combined with the appearance of PSP staff, this indicates once again that the Board served as something of a forum for debate,

and that its representatives were exposed to a variety of presentations whether at their own request or otherwise.

C. Decisions in Order of Significance/Impact

The basis for the identification of minute items as of low, medium or high significance or potential impact on Project operation or administration thinking has been discussed in the introductory section of this analysis.

It is evident from Section C of Table 4 that the overwhelming majority of the Board's "decisions" were of the low-impact variety (n=83) with slightly more than one-third that number (n=32) falling into the medium impact category. Given the quality and character of the specific decisions made, it cannot be said that any of them appreciably affected either the operation of the PSP or the thinking of its administration. There may even be some doubt as to the extent of the impact of the five decisions made over the course of the Project judged by the evaluation team to have had a relatively high potential impact on PSP, namely the decisions to implement two town meetings, two community surveys, and one parent survey. In short, the decisions made by the Board were essentially routine ones.

D. Information Flow

1. Section D of Table 4 further indicates the usefulness of the Board of Cooperatives as a means of keeping the more interested and potentially more influential citizens of the community informed of the Project's activities. The minutes of Coop meetings reveal approximately 152 instances in which information in the form of announcements or presentations passed from the Project to the Coop Board representatives as against only 34 recorded instances in which information was requested by PSP or Coop Board Representatives, presumably either of their own

initiative (n=25), or by Coop Board Representatives at the instigation of their constituent cooperatives (n=9). In short, the Board of Cooperatives was, on balance, a "listening" body more than it was a questioning body.

2. The presentation of individual Coop reports was sporadic and, at best, minimally expressive of the concerns of the Board Representatives' constituent cooperatives. The official record of individual Coop reports over five years (n=96) averaged out to slightly more than two per meeting. In many instances, no reports were read. Coop Board Reps thus were left mainly to their own devices in respect to the character and quality of their participation in and contribution to the Coop Board, suggesting that the links between the parent board and their constituent agencies were, at best, tenuous, at worst non-existent. The BOC Reps thus stood as something of an in-group unto themselves.

E. Cooperatives Board Impact on PSP

The findings from Section E of Table 4 indicate that the BOC did not function as a policy-making organ of the Project and, moreover, that it had minimal impact on PSP operation or administration thinking beyond keeping the Project "honest" by asking questions. Minutes of BOC Meetings yield a total of 28 instances over five years in which the PSP referred items to the Coop Board for their consideration or action. Typical of such items were: (1) a request for "Board members to provide Project staff with information about Cooperatives' activities during Years Four and Five" (October 1974); (2) a request for "the Board's reaction to a possible community meeting involving the Director of Experimental Schools Program, along with other dignitaries" (May 1973); (3) "the Superintendent (Dr. H.) asked Board members to provide suggestions about what should be done with regard to

(the organization and implementation of) citizen advisory groups" (May 9, 1974). By and large, the kind of requests from PSP to the Coop Board that appear in the minutes are perfunctory.

Finally, it is noted that between August 1972 and June 1977, the Coop Board made a total of 11 officially recorded policy recommendations to the PSP. Some of these were less perfunctory than were the items which the PSP brought to the attention of the Board for the latter's consideration, suggesting, perhaps, that the representative of the Coop Board took themselves somewhat more seriously than they were taken by the administration of the PSP. The following several excerpts from the minutes of the Coop Board give the reader a feeling for the character of the Board's policy recommendations: (1) a recommendation "that the purpose and goals of Project education go unchanged" (May 1973); (2) that "the administration should report (to the Board) on any new multi-age grouping plans for 1974-75" (February 1974); (3) a recommendation "to the Project administration that in-service activities be planned to help teachers with the utilization of packets and other individualized materials" (September 1974); (4) a recommendation "that a Cooperatives Board Communications Committee be appointed to coordinate Board public relations" (October 1975).

Section E-3 of Table 4 indicates that the minutes yield no recorded instances over the entirety of the Project that any of the Board's policy recommendations were adopted by either the PSP or the Greenville County School District. This is misleading. We know, for example, that a Coop Board Communications Committee was, in fact, established as recommended in (4) above. And, while it is not officially recorded that the PSP immediately and directly responded to the kind of recommendations exemplified in (2) above, it is evident from the increase over time in the number of presentations to the Board by PSP staff (see Section B-3, Table 4), that the PSP became increasingly sensitive to the desire of the Board to be kept reasonably informed of the kind of things that the Project was "up to."

Board Members' Further Assessments of BOC Effectiveness

Generally, the representatives of the Board of Cooperatives expressed mixed estimations of the effectiveness of the Board itself. They indicated that the Board was not accomplishing all that it could or should. But they were grateful, nonetheless, for its existence. It was seen as "better" than what they had before, which, in the words of one representative, was "nothing." And they referred continually to the Board's "potential":

> I don't think it's as effective as it could and ought to be. But it is on the road to becomming very effective . . . if the schools and the people want it...I'm on my second year on the Board. Right now I see more promise in relating to the community than at any point since its beginning. I don't think we've nearly mastered this. And I don't think the community really feels like the schools listen to them when it voices a concern. But I'm convinced this can get better if the Board can reach out to the community. [Excerpt from interview with BOC member, November 5, 1975].

Another offered this view of the Board's potential:

> I will say it's better than what we had before. 'Cause before we had nothing. The potential is there. I'm just not sure it has materialized. [Excerpt from interview with BOC member, November 6, 1975.]

A representative with three years' experience on the Board offered perhaps the most critical of any comment:

> I feel that Cooperatives Board actually accomplishes very little. The channel is there for everyone in Greer. But you have to face the fact it's not being used . . . the weakness is that too many people don't know it exists. Part of that is apathy. Part denotes a lack of interest in what's going on in Greer. [Excerpt from interview with BOC member, May 26, 1976.]

By the final month of the Project, some of the optimism of Year Four had given way to the hard realities of Year Five and beyond. One notes a general feeling among board members themselves that the Board had not lived up to its promise; repeated references to its unrepresentative makeup; doubts about its survival. Yet, for all the expressed disappointment over the alleged failure of the Board to meet its original objectives, there was precious little understanding amongst some of its own representatives of the reasons why. The following verbatim account of a representative with two years' experience of the Board makes the point. Asked how she felt about the Cooperative Board in what turned out to be the final month of its existence, she responded thus:

> "I guess my first feeling is I'm disappointed. I feel like overall, somehow, the makeup has varied so, particularly this year, where we have some members very willing and active, and some with no concept of the Board . . . .
>
> I don't think it's been representative of the community. One reason for this, I believe, is when the Board was first organized, there was a big effort to limit and restrict the membership."
>
> Asked if she felt the BOC had made much impact on the Project, and on the thinking of the PSP administration, she offered: "Probably not." ("Why?") "Could be because of the changes. Dr. C was the third director . . . . As for Dr. H. his appearances at our Board meetings were very brief. It seemed when he needed us, like with the tax referendum, he'd be in a few minutes. Very seldom was he seeking our input." [Excerpt from interview with BOC member June 17, 1977.]

In conclusion, it is perhaps worth noting an assessment of the Board of Cooperatives in relation to the PSP community by an individual with something of an "outside" point of view. The following comes from one of the representatives to the Project's Professional Liaison Committee (PLC):

> Whether the current structure (of the Project) is a viable one for this particular community, I don't know. There does not seem to be the interest from the community, after setting up all these avenues for community involvement, that the community itself claims to have wanted in the first place. [Excerpt from interview with PLC Representative, October 2, 1975.]

Referring to the ineffectiveness of the individual cooperatives in further support of this point, he notes:

> The story I get is you could never get the Coops to deal with anything substantive. But then I don't see how you can expect these mill workers in Greer to suddenly run down to the Project with a long list of what they think they need. I just don't think we've found the link between the philosophy behind PSP, and the implementation of it in practice. But, finally, I should say that I just don't know if it's even realistic to expect that kind of thing of the people in the Project, expect them to have that kind of time, to not only administer a sizeable and complex program, but also have time to run downtown and ensure community participation. I guess I've always wondered just how much honest feeling there is for a need for community participation. And yet, from what I've heard and seen, I'm not sure the Project people haven't made some honest efforts to make it happen. Maybe there comes a time when you just have to admit that something like that isn't working, and isn't going to work. [Excerpt from interview with PLC Representative, October 2, 1975.]

CONCLUSION

> "The real reins of decision-making were never relinquished in this project. If we were really going ahead with participatory decision-making, then we should have gone all the way. Talk is cheap." (Interview with PSP staff member, June 21, 1977.)

A major stated objective of the Piedmont Schools Project was greater involvement of the lay community in the decision-making process. The Board of Cooperatives was to have been the primary vehicle for the achievement of this goal. The points raised in the preceding sections indicate, however, that the Board was not significantly involved in the Project's decision-making process. Rather, it has been suggested that the Board of Cooperatives was a "listening" and "questioning" rather than a "policy-making" organ of the Project, that it had little impact on administration thinking, and that, although it began as "broadly based," it evolved over the course of the Project into an organization that no longer could accurately be described as either broadly based or "representative" of most segments of the community, despite the efforts of the PSP personnel to "include" everyone.

On the basis of that kind of information, it might be considered that the Board "failed" in its purpose. On the other hand, one can also take a view of the functioning of the Board as a realistic, if not predictable, development. Certain of the Cooperatives Board's initial goals probably were less a result of a consideration of socio-economic and political imperatives than a naive interpretation of, and allegiance to, democratic ideals and the corollary that "everyone" in a democracy not only can, but should have, a part in the making of decisions. However, the unfortunate fact is that "disadvantaged" citizens are usually the least informed about matters of schooling, with

the result that more "advantaged" clienteles will have a relatively greater impact on school innovations unless extraordinary efforts are made to involve others. One recalls, for example, the description of one of the poorer sections of the Greer Community offered by the principal of one of its elementary schools:

> The people here are pretty apathetic [towards school]. They got other more immediate concerns, like work, and even getting enough food to eat.

Perhaps the major inference to be drawn from this is that many well meaning attempts to provide for broad-based citizen/parent involvement in school decision-making fail because they seek participation from segments of the community who do not have the time or motivation to become involved. Citizen/parent groups are not a homogeneous group. They cluster into clienteles which are different from one another in socio-economic makeup, levels of education, degree of motivation and interests, and ordinary everyday concerns. The variability of the community needs to be considered in efforts to attain so-called "broad-based" citizen involvement. The Board of Cooperatives of the PSP, for example, was characterized by a level of activity which was roughly consistent with--and therefore more appealing to--the interests of the more affluent, better educated segments of the Greer community. The Board's activities clearly were of less interest to the less affluent, less educated, "disadvantaged" segments of the community. Naturally, these "disadvantaged" segments should be offered every opportunity to participate. Indeed, they should be encouraged to do so. But in the absence of considerable expenditure of time and effort, it is probably unrealistic to expect citizen/parent involvement to evolve along broad-based lines as conceived by the original planners of PSP.

In light of this, the "unrepresentative" makeup of the Cooperatives Board is not surprising. Indeed, in the circumstances one might be appreciative of the fact of the Board's existence

at all, not to mention the show and extent of interest of certain of its membership despite their essentially upper-middle-class composition.

Moreover, the BOC clearly was not merely a listening organ. As has been pointed out, it was also a questioning organ. And the questions it asked may be judged to have been increasingly "good" ones. If nothing else, the Board's members thus helped to keep the Project "honest."

The study further concluded that community interest was more likely to come from parents than non-parents and to focus on their individual child and what was happening to that child at the hands of the Project. For many of the disadvantaged the Cooperatives Board's activities were seen as too distant and complicated to gain and hold their interest--that is, if they knew of its existence at all; the 1976 Community Survey suggested that the majority of them did not.

If the Greer public schools truly hope to gain input from these segments of the community--if not a vaster number of parents generally--they probably will have to provide them with greater opportunities for meaningful involvement in the solution of problems that are both relevant to their concerns and within the limits of their possibilities. For most parents, this means dealing with problems that are at least specific, and better yet, "my child" specific.

In sum, then, the Cooperatives Board functioned as a useful and legitimate forum for debate. It was one of several of the Project's thermostats, indicating the temper of a limited segment of public opinion and concern and, in the process, helping to keep the system in balance. If it was not an essential mechanism of the Project, it was the next best thing. For, had it not been the Board of Cooperatives, then certainly there would have to have been an alternative institutional safety valve--some other outlet for the otherwise bottled-up frustration of those members of the community interested enough to care about the education of their children at the hands of the schools and influential enough to do something about it.

For all this, the fact remains that the Board of Cooperatives did not survive one single month beyond the end of funding of the Project in June 1977. The reasons generally were as follows: little clear understanding of the board's purposes, no real investiture of authority or decision-making powers, the growing realization of this fact by all concerned, the difficulty of implementing--and retaining--broad-based citizen interest and involvement in schooling decisions. The PSP experience offers an example of the espousal of the concept of cooperative decision-making without sufficient commitment to establishing the conditions necessary for making the concept work.

IMPLICATIONS

Analysis of the data completed for this study resulted in a number of implications for the concept of citizen involvement in educational decision-making. Because the study was limited to one community, however, their generalizability should be viewed with caution:

1. Many well-intentioned attempts to provide for broad-based community involvement in school decision-making fail because they seek participation from segments of the community who have neither the time, motivation, nor self-confidence to become involved. If we are genuinely interested in retaining the interest of these "disadvantaged" segments, we need somehow to pay special attention to them. For example: meet in extra sessions with them, move the meetings to their home turf, meet with them individually or in small groups to explain things and strengthen their self-confidence, or identify indigenous leaders and provide training for them. If the public schools hope to gain input from disadvantaged segments of the community, they will have to provide them with greater opportunities for meaningful involvement in the solution of problems that are both

relevant to their concerns and within the limits of their possibilities.

2. Organizing the citizenry--particularly the lower social class--to achieve long-range positive goals is hard work. We therefore need to be thoroughly honest with ourselves about the character and extent of our commitment to the concept of participatory decision-making. And we should be prepared to admit there may be some situations where broad-based participation simply is not feasible.
3. We need to be especially clear about our expectations of citizens advisory boards, the extent to which we are truly willing to delegate decision-making authority to them, and the kind of issues about which the citizenry feel sufficiently competent to make judgments. The experience of the PSP clearly suggests that (1) community involvement in educational decision-making will <u>not</u> be productive when people do not know what is required of them, and (2) programs having vague goals and vague requirements will be rewarded with vague results.

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